

Lingle at MCC: Hawaii should be national health care leader

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At the MCC Student Lounge Monday morning, Lingle spoke to around 80 students, faculty members and others during a stop on Maui for other events, including a Republican Party rally for candidates at the Mayor Hannibal Tavares Community Center in Pukalani.

Lingle said her administration has taken preventive measures to prohibit children's exposure to secondhand smoke, has given additional money for drug abuse treatment and is also working on long-term health care solutions.

Among those solutions is looking at ways to encourage people to stay healthy, perhaps giving tax credits for those taking preventive health measures and maybe helping people get gym memberships paid by health insurance companies.

Now, that's not happening because health maintenance organizations give benefits only to people coping with health problems.

"We want to change that," the governor said.

While people's health may be determined in part by the genes they've inherited from their parents, people nevertheless can improve their lives by adopting healthy lifestyles, as by not smoking and getting more exercise, Lingle said.

"The individuals also have an obligation to themselves," she said.

Lingle commended those studying and working in the fields of nursing and health and human services.

She said her mother is in a nursing home, and she knows from first-hand experience that health care professionals provide patients with a "quality of life."

Hawaii has a shortage of nurses, but that's not a problem unique to the state, she said, adding that there aren't enough teachers as well.

She said nursing and teaching positions were traditionally held by women, but "women today have so many options."

Lingle also fielded questions from the audience.

Denise Cohen, nurse practitioner at the MCC Health Center, told Lingle that she doesn't actually have to go "out of the box" to assist with health care.

Cohen called for more help with insurance payments for medicines such as flu shots and birth control pills.

She said insurance companies could assist by reimbursing more money to clinics to help cover costs and helping students by paying for medicine.

Lingle said she'd take Cohen's idea and the suggestions of others under advisement.

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